

Steven Kennedy—Parks Canada Interview, February 16, 2012

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Darren Prefontaine (DP): ... It is February 16th and this is Darren Prefontaine interviewing Steven Kennedy for the Fort Battleford-Parks Canada project. How you doing today Steven?

Steven Kennedy (SK): Good.

DP: That's good. Could you please tell me your name and home community?

SK: Steven Kennedy. I live in North Battleford, Saskatchewan.

DP: Okay, who were or are your parents and grandparents and where were they from?

SK: Well my dad was from, originally from Green Lake.

DP: Okay.

SK: My mom was from Waterhen.

DP: Waterhen, and what were their names?

SK: My dad's name was Bill Kennedy. And my mom was Margaret Martell.

DP: Martell, and you know your grandparents' names?

SK: I, Just wait, Debbie what's my grandmother's name? Alice Martell.

DP: Alice Martell.

SK: And Nazaire Martell, my grandpa.

DP: Okay, does anyone in your family speak Michif or are you basically Cree speakers?

SK: Well Cree and English.

DP: Cree and English.

DP: And that's always been the main family language, Cree?

SK: Yeah.

DP: Okay, did anyone in your family serve in the military, say World War one, World War two or Korea?

SK: My uncle. My uncle, his name was Lawrence Martell.

DP: Okay.

SK: He served in Belgium, Germany, and two other places I guess.

DP: In World War Two or World War One?

SK: World War Two.

DP: Okay. How were the Métis treated in your community? Did your family encounter racism within the larger community by non-Aboriginal people?

SK: Yep.

DP: It was quite bad or?

SK: Yep, it was pretty wild. A lot better than Treaty Indians.

DP: You think—

SK: I can ... there's always tension there. I drove taxi in North Battleford for 25 years and I seen lots of racist, racism. I seen lots of abuse and stuff like that.

DP: So more so against Treaty Indians than say, Métis?

SK: Yep.

DP: But you did see a lot of racism in your time. Okay, what other Métis families lived around you and were they Michif speakers or mainly Cree speakers?

SK: There's a couple of families in town here that do help the Michif. And, there's quite a few people, Métis people that help the Cree and you know English and that.

DP: Okay. Do you know any traditional Métis stories or songs?

SK: No.

DP: No. Nothing, like relating to Wiisakaychak or Whiitago or anything like that? Were those stories told?

SK: No.

DP: No. What sort of resources did your family harvest? How did your mom and dad make a living?

SK: Well my dad was a construction worker. He built his own house, and he did lots of cement work and that.

DP: Okay.

SK: And he helped build the Comprehensive High School and...

DP: Okay.

SK: He had built his own house.

DP: Okay. Did, did any of your family live on the land and say, hunt or trap? Or—

SK: No.

DP: Nothing like that, just basically been city dwellers for a couple generations.

SK: Yep.

DP: Okay.

SK: My dad was, he taught us how to do splint work. Concrete, sidewalks, driveways, stuff like that.

DP: And your brothers and all your family worked in those trades?

SK: What's that?

DP: I said your brothers and the rest of your family all helped out with that trade?

SK: Yeah, yeah.

DP: Okay.

SK: He never did go to school. My mom never went either.

DP: No?

SK: No.

DP: Nobody, you didn't have family that say hunted or trapped? You basically just stayed in the city?

SK: Yep.

DP: Okay. Did anyone in your family use traditional Aboriginal medicines and healing?

SK: No.

DP: No, okay. So you never had like a family healer or midwife or anything like that?

SK: No.

DP: You just went to the hospital and used doctors?

SK: Yep.

DP: Okay.

SK: Well what we'd do is sometimes we'd go to a healer on a reserve and stuff like that.

DP: Okay.

SK: Go to sweats.

DP: So you go to sweats and you see First Nations healers?

SK: Yep.

DP: Is that prevalent within your family?

SK: Some...

DP: Some?

SK: Some.

DP: Okay. Does your family practice Aboriginal spiritualism, but I guess as well Christianity too right?

SK: Yep, yep.

DP: Catholic, Protestant?

SK: Well Catholic and Christian.

DP: Okay. Did anyone in your family live in a road allowance community, like you just lived in the city and your dad owned a home?

SK: My brothers and sisters, the older ones, they used to live in Midnight Lake.

DP: Okay.

SK: Cochin, stuff like that I guess.

DP: Okay, okay.

SK: They were pretty small I guess.

DP: Okay, did anyone in your family make beaded or embroidered moccasins or other items?

SK: No, no.

DP: No? How did your family celebrate special occasions and holidays such as Christmas, Easter or New Years?

SK: Celebrated together.

DP: Okay.

SK: There's no like... You still get together...nothing, you know?

DP: Did, they like play fiddle music and dance? Or have like a big feast? Or?

SK: First a big dinner and some kids, like kids would do jigging and...

DP: Okay.

SK: Stuff like that.

DP: Did everyone go to, like mass?

SK: Well Christmas.

DP: Just Christmas, okay.

SK: Midnight mass.

DP: Okay. That was pretty prominent back in the day?

SK: Yep.

DP: Was anybody in your family ever involved with the Métis Society?

SK: Yep.

DP: Uh, who was involved?

SK: Well my brother, Ralph.

DP: Oh, okay.

SK: And my brother, Billy.

DP: Okay.

SK: He's an area director. My brother Billy is an area director in North Battleford there.

DP: Okay.

SK: And, well the secretary, treasurer I guess for the Métis local.

DP: Oh, okay. How many, how many children did your mother and father have?

SK: Eleven.

DP: Eleven. That is quite a big family.

SK: Yep.

DP: And spread out over a large number of years? Like your oldest siblings are a lot older or?

SK: Yep, yep.

DP: Okay.

SK: The oldest one passed away, he would have been sixty-five.

DP: Okay, most of your brothers and sisters settle in and around the Battlefords?

SK: Yep. Yep, except for one sister that lives in Saskatoon.

DP: Okay. How, you mentioned you had some connection to a reserve at Cochin, how long has your family lived around the Battlefords? Do you have a sense, like does it go back to say the 1885 Resistance? Or?

SK: No, but they...well...My dad comes from Green Lake but that was in the early 1900s.

DP: Okay.

SK: Yeah.

DP: Okay. So, the family moved to the Battlefords area, say near 1900, like 1920s or so?

SK: They moved this way, moved south from that way.

DP: Okay.

SK: See my dad, his roots come from England.

DP: Okay.

SK: And he, his dad was working for the Hudson's Bay Company.

DP: Okay.

SK: And that's where he met my grandma. And then they had a boy so they didn't have no other kids.

DP: Okay so, your grandpa was an Englishman who married an Aboriginal woman?

SK: No, they just were together.

DP: Okay. Was anybody in your family involved in the 1885 Resistance?

...

SK: No.

...

DP: Okay. As a Métis person who has roots in the Battlefords area, are there any places in and around the Battlefords that you think are important as a Métis person?

SK: Eh?

DP: Like any landscapes or historical things?

SK: Well I heard something about the Battleford, Fort Battleford there.

DP: Okay.

SK: There's some graveyards, graves out there.

DP: Okay.

SK: Maybe some Métis people are buried there to at the same time with the natives, you never know.

DP: So you think that is definitely worth...?

SK: Looking into, yeah.

DP: Preserving and promoting.

SK: Yep.

DP: What sort of relationship did the Métis have that you could remember, stories that maybe your parents told you, about their relationship with the Mounted Police? Like was it a good relationship? Or you're not sure?

SK: Well not really, no. They never really talked about that with the RCMP.

DP: Okay, did any, you don't know of any of your ancestors ever worked for the Mounted Police as scouts maybe at the fort or...

SK: No.

DP: No. Did any of your ancestors take Métis Scrip at the Fort Battleford or around the area? Are you aware of that?

SK: No, no.

DP: No. How do you think Parks Canada can make interpretation of Métis history and culture better at Fort Battleford? Do you have any ideas? Are there any things that you think might improve interpretation of Métis history and culture?

SK: No, not ... I'd have to, I'd have to do a survey myself.

DP: Okay.

SK: You know, talk to the other people and maybe they would, know how? You know what I mean like? They might know some, or maybe you might come across some people from the North Battleford area that can answer that question?

DP: Okay, is there anything you would like to share about being Métis and living in North Battleford or anything that you think is important?

SK: Well, I don't know. I would just like to see, what I'd like to see I s... I'd like to see Métis stop fighting and instead of you know, doing things. Self-government, self-government issued, get a land base going. And then after they get land base, it's you know, then they can say self-government. But it's, right now they're all saying, "Oh self-government, oh-self government." They're all pocketing the money. Know what I mean?

DP: Yeah. Fair enough. So you think a Métis land base is the most important thing?

SK: Yep. We have to have, we have to have land before they can say anything about land, I mean, self-government.

DP: Okay. Is there anything else you would like to add Steven?

SK: No, no, that was the main thing that I wanted to say about the land.

DP: Okay. I'll stop the interview ...